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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: GHANA'S ELECTION GENERALLY PEACEFUL, FREE AND FAIR

REF: A. A) ACCRA 2366

1B. B) ACCRA 2367

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY

11. (SBU) Summary: Ghana's December 7 presidential and parliamentary election was generally peaceful, free and fair, as of 4 pm today. There were isolated incidents of violence and some delays caused by shortages of materials and other procedural glitches. We should have final election results on December 8. End summary.

12. (U) Ghanaians went to the polls December 7 to elect the country's next president/vice president and 230 members of parliament. As of 4 pm December 7, the election appears to be generally peaceful, free and fair, with only minor procedural glitches and a few isolated incidents of violence. This message draws from media reports and reporting from our 30 observer teams in the field (including from the Ambassador and DCM, who spent much of the day as observers).

Generally Smooth Process

13. (SBU) In most polling stations, voting was smooth, orderly, and calm. In many areas, eager voters lined up hours before the polls opened at 7 am. Turnout appeared to be high (an estimated 50-60 percent voted as of around noon). In polling stations we visited, almost all voters were able to vote, with very few not appearing on the voter register. In these stations, electoral officials and party polling agents were satisfied that the process was free and fair. Security was visible and appeared adequate. Our teams saw domestic observers at almost all polling stations, as well as some observers from other foreign missions.

14. (U) A number of polling stations were late in getting voting materials or experienced some lapse which caused delays in getting started. Although they raised tensions and created initial confusion at some polling stations, almost all these glitches were worked out within about an hour. One polling station in Volta region (an NDC opposition stronghold area) had not received voting materials as of noon, according to press reports. One Takoradi constituency was missing a cover for its presidential ballot box. As a result, some voters reportedly skipped the presidential vote and only cast ballots for parliamentary candidates (The missing cover was found about two hours after voting started). According to radio reports, voters at one polling station in Kumasi (Ashanti Region) cast ballots in plastic bags because the ballot boxes never arrived. One of our observers in Volta region noted that no polling booths in her area had tactile ballots for the blind. She saw several blind people voting with assistance from relatives.

Mostly Peaceful, but Some Violence

15. (SBU) Voting was peaceful in most of the country. Media reports noted three incidents of significant violence. In the volatile town of Bawku (Upper East region) gunshots briefly disrupted voting, although there were reportedly no deaths. It is not clear why shots were fired, although the press speculated it might be related to confusion over the registration of a parliamentary candidate. Radio reports indicate there was shooting in Tamale (Northern Region), although our two observer teams and DAO reps in Tamale have not heard this. (DAO reps said the only incident they witnessed was a car chase near a polling station, while our observers report all is calm in Tamale.) In Volta region, one radio program reported that a bodyguard of the Regional Minister (roughly equivalent to a U.S. Governor) shot and killed two people for reasons which are unclear. (Comment: post has up to this reporting time been unable to confirm this report. End comment.)

16. (SBU) Other reported incidents of tension were isolated and minor. According to media reports, there were scuffles in several polling stations in Odododiodio constituency (Greater Accra) when party activists from the National Democratic Congress (NDC) party and the ruling New Patriotic

Party (NPP) accused each other of switching ballot boxes (there were no reported injuries). Police quickly controlled the situation and made several arrests. In Eastern region, fighting broke out in one constituency over alleged stuffing of ballot papers, according to radio reports. In both cases, voting appeared to be unaffected. Our observer in the southern Volta region reported seeing men with clubs at one constituency and noted that the police detained a man taking a knife into a polling station.

Comment

17. (SBU) Overall, while not free of violence, this has been an impressive election day so far. Large numbers of excited voters waited in long, hot lines, sometimes up to 4-5 hours, to cast their votes. Electoral Commission officials and security personnel were present throughout Accra. Polling agents (most were NDC and NPP) took their jobs very seriously. None of our observers witnessed violence or major irregularities. Some of the radio reports of violence may turn out to be unfounded rumors. We will call AF/W around 11:30 pm Accra time to provide a more complete report on the election process as well as preliminary results. We expect final results on December 8.

YATES